

University of Groningen

The Apocalypse Of Peter

Bremmer, Jan N.; Czachesz, István

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

2003

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Bremmer, J. N., & Czachesz, I. (2003). *The Apocalypse Of Peter*. (7 ed.) Peeters.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

VII. Sinners and Post-Mortem 'Baptism' in the Acherusian Lake

KIRSTI B. COPELAND

The *Apocalypse of Peter* (*ApPt*, early 2nd century AD) is one of the earliest extant works to depict the 'baptism' of sinners in the Acherusian Lake as a vital part of the Christian afterlife¹. Through an examination of other Christian apocrypha that mention a post-mortem 'washing' in the Acherusian Lake, Peterson rightly raises the question of whether the *ApPt*'s 'baptism' is really a baptism at all. Washing in the Acherusian Lake is closely tied to baptismal cult only in the latest of the apocryphal works that includes the lake in its otherworldly landscape: the *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle* (*ResJC*, 8-9th c. AD)². The majority of the other Christian texts of the first four centuries AD to mention the

¹ The most important work to date on this topic is the now classic article by E. Peterson, 'Die "Taufe" im Acherusischen See', in his *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis. Studien und Untersuchungen* (Rome, 1959) 310-32. Also valuable on this topic is R. Bauckham, 'The Conflict of Justice and Mercy', in his *The Fate of the Dead. Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden, 1998) 132-48. And of course, any current work on *ApPt* must be indebted to R. Bauckham, 'The Apocalypse of Peter: An Account of Research', *ANRW* II.25.6 (1988) 4713-50.

A translation and edition of *ResJC* are found in E.A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London, 1913) 1-48, 179-215 and in M. Westerhoff, *Auferstehung und Jenseits im koptischen 'Buch der Auferstehung Jesu Christi. unseres Herrn'* (Wiesbaden, 1999) 48-197. On the dating, I follow Westerhoff, 226-7. Earlier dates from the 5th-7th c. have been suggested. See J.-D. Kaestli and P. Cherix, *L'Évangile de Barthélemy d'après deux écrits apocryphes* (Turnhout, 1993) 172 and M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1924) 186.

Acherusian Lake, namely the second book of the Sibylline Oracles (*SibOr*2, mid 2nd century AD), the Apocalypse of Moses (*ApMos*, 1st-3rd c. AD)³, Paul of Tamma's Cell (late 4th century AD), and the Apocalypse of Paul (*ApPl*, late 4th century AD)⁴, suggest that the connection between baptismal cult and the Acherusian Lake is very weak in early Christianity⁵. The primary significance of the Acherusian Lake for these texts must be sought elsewhere. This 'washing' is indicative of three other aspects of early Christianity: the post-mortem washing of the dead, the need for an otherworldly rite to mark completed repentance, and the ability of martyrs to grant the remission of sins.

ApPt 14 refers specifically to 'baptism' (*baptisma*) in the Acherusian Lake both in the Ethiopic manuscripts and in the Greek Rainer fragment that preserves this passage⁶. However, among the re-

³ I am currently of the opinion that the *ApMos* is a Christian text. However, many scholars have been inclined to see the *ApMos* as a Jewish text, see Peterson, 'Die "Taufe"', 320-2, and L.S.A. Wells, 'The Books of Adam and Eve', in R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1963) 123-30. The *ApMos* is used extensively in the reconstruction of the Jewish Adam legends in Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1961). I.M. Stone, *A History of the Literature of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta, 1992) 57 seems to consider the work Jewish, but he is very tentative. D.A. Bertrand, *La vie grecque d'Adam et d'Eve* (Paris, 1987) 36 writes of the provenance of the *ApMos* that, 'il est sans conteste juif'.

⁴ On the dating of *ApPl* see P. Piovaneli, 'Les origines de l'*Apocalypse de Paul* reconsidérées', *Apocrypha* 4 (1993) 25-64 and now K. Copeland, *Mapping the Apocalypse of Paul. Geography, Genre and History*, Dissertation (Princeton, 2001) 21-35. Both date *ApPl* by the consular date in its preface, AD 388, arguing against a third-century date suggested by R. Casey, 'The Apocalypse of Paul', *JTS* 34 (1933) 1-33.

⁵ It is worth noting that, to my knowledge, no text from Nag Hammadi mentions the Acherusian Lake. Thus, the magical text London Ms. Or. 5987 remains the only text with gnostic associations to mention the Acherusian Lake; see A.M. Kropp, *Ausgewählte Koptische Zaubertexte* (Brussels, 1931) I.22-8, II.149-60. It does not, however, refer to washing or baptism in the Acherusian Lake. Thus, there is no evidence of a particular connection to gnosticism as Peterson, 'Die "Taufe"', 332, conjectured.

⁶ M.R. James, 'The Rainer Fragment of the *Apocalypse of Peter*', *JTS* 32 (1931) 270-9. For the Ethiopic, I rely on D.D. Buchholz, *Your Eyes Will Be*

maintaining Christian apocrypha that mention the Acherusian Lake, only the Latin version of *ApPI* uses the same technical term, 'baptizat'⁷. Although the long Latin manuscripts of *ApPI* are generally the best indication of its contents, the late Greek abbreviations and the Coptic version are often more reliable witnesses to the original Greek vocabulary. Notably, none of these manuscripts refers to baptism. The Greek manuscripts of *ApPI* describe the soul being cast (*ballouein*) into the Acherusian Lake⁸. And the Coptic manuscript says that Michael washes (*jokm*)⁹ the soul in the Acherusian Lake¹⁰. The other apocryphal texts agree with the Coptic version of *ApPI*. In *ApMos*, a seraph washes (*apolouein*, *apoplounein*) Adam's soul in the Acherusian Lake". Even *ResJC*, which uses *baptizein* in a different context, again records that Michael washed (*jokm*) the soul in the Acherusian Lake. Thus, *ApPt* is in the minority of these Christian texts in referring specifically to a 'baptism' and not to a 'washing' in this otherworldly lake.

Peterson contrasts the use of 'baptism' in the Christian *ApPt* and the Latin *ApPI* with 'washing' in *ApMos*, a text he considers to be Jewish. He attempts to show that 'baptism' in the Acherusian Lake is

Opened. A Study of the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter (Atlanta, 1988) 345.

⁷ *ApPI* 22 (L1: P, StG, Arn), ed. T. Silverstein and A. Hilhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul. A New Critical Edition of Three Long Latin Versions* (Geneva, 1997) 118-9. The language of the earliest Latin manuscript (P, 8th c. AD) is usually dated to the 6th c. AD.

⁸ *ApPI* 22 (Greek), ed. C. von Tischendorf, *Apocalypses Apocryphae* (Lipsiae, 1866) 51.

⁹ Although *jokm* can be used in reference to baptism, *baptizein* would normally be rendered in Coptic by *ti jokm*, *ti oms* or *baptize*. Without the helper verb *ti*, *jokm* generally means to wash. See W.E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford, 1939) 762-3.

¹⁰ *ApPI* 22 (Coptic), ed. Copeland, 262. Also edited by E.A. Wallis Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts in the Dialogue of Upper Egypt* (London, 1915).

¹¹ There are three main editions of the Greek *ApMos*. Bertrand, *La vie grecque*; M. Nagel in A.-M. Denis (ed), *Concordance grecque des pseudépigraphes d'Ancien Testament* (Louvain, 1987) 815-8, reprinted in G. Anderson and M. Stone, *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta, 1994); C. von Tischendorf, 'Apocalypsis Mosis', in *Apocalypses Apocryphae*, 1-23.

a secondary Christianisation of a Jewish motif¹². Peterson's argument has been challenged by Marinus de Jonge and Johannes Tromp, who highlight his failure to find Jewish parallels to the use of the Achemsian Lake outside of *ApMos*¹³.

Peterson claims that Louis Ginzberg has found and noted several Jewish parallels to washing in the Acherusian Lake¹⁴. However, Ginzberg's suggested parallels demonstrate his own mistaken assumptions about the Acherusian Lake in *ApMos*; they do not demonstrate that *ApMos* reflects common Jewish lore. First of all, Ginzberg writes that Adam is washed in the 'river Acheron'¹⁵, when *ApMos* clearly states, the 'Acherusian Lake'. Ginzberg does not then adduce Jewish texts that mention either the Acherusian Lake or the river Acheron. Instead he draws parallels to the river of fire, wrongly assuming that the Achemsian Lake, the river Acheron, and the river of fire are all the same otherworldly body¹⁶.

In fact, although many modern scholars believe that early Christians conflated the Acherusian Lake and the river of fire¹⁷, none of the Christian apocrypha that mention the lake describes it as a lake of fire. Furthermore, many of these Christian apocryphal works contain a river of fire in addition to the Achemsian Lake, and this river of fire invariably has a very different function from that of the lake. In *ApPt* and *ApPl*, the river of fire eternally torments the damned¹⁸. As a

¹² Peterson, 'Die "Taufe"', 322.

¹³ M. de Jonge and J. Tromp, *The Life of Adam and Eve and Related Literature* (Sheffield, 1997) 67-75.

¹⁴ Peterson, 'Die "Taufe"', 322.

¹⁵ Ginzberg, *Legends* 1, 100.

¹⁶ Ginzberg, *Legends* 1, 125, note 134. See also K. Kohler, 'Acheron, or Acherusian Lake', *Jewish Encyclopedia* 1, 165. Kohler equates the river of fire in *I Enoch* 17 with Acherusia.

¹⁷ See, for example, C.-M. Edsman, *Le baptême de feu* (Uppsala, 1940) 57-66. Edsman argues that the baptism in the Acherusian Lake in *ApPt* and *ApPl* corresponds to the many examples of post-mortem baptism by fire. So also V. MacDermot, *The Cult of the Seer in the Ancient Middle East* (Berkeley, 1971) 175.

¹⁸ Of course, the presence of rivers of fire comes as no surprise given the fiery nature of the Greek Hades and the Hellenistic Jewish hell inherited by Christian authors. See A. Dieterich, *Nekyia. Beiträge zur Erklärung der*

means of punishment, the river of fire is distinct from the Acherusian Lake, a means of forgiveness. In *ResJC*, the river of fire does not inflict eternal torment, instead it tests the soul, becoming like a river of water to the righteous. The soul first passes through the river of fire, and then, it is washed in the Acherusian Lake; the two bodies of water are separate, even if proximate. Moreover, related texts that describe baptism of the righteous in the river of fire never, to my knowledge, refer to that fiery river as the Acherusian Lake¹⁹.

Since Ginzberg's parallels to the river of fire are insufficient, there is little evidence at this point to suggest that the post-mortem washing in the Acherusian Lake derives from a Jewish source. Yet there is good evidence that this is primarily a 'washing' and only secondarily a 'baptism', raising the question of what other significance this post-mortem washing might have held for early Christians.

1. Washing of the Dead, Repentant Sinners, and Martyr Cult

Notably, early Jews and Christians both washed their dead for burial²⁰. In *Acts* 9.37, before Peter came to raise Tabitha, 'they had washed (*lousantes*) her and laid her in a room upstairs'²¹. The *Gospel of Peter* (mid-2nd c. AD) adds a detail to the burial of Jesus not

neuentdecken Petrusapokalypse (Berlin, 1893, 1913²) and M. Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell. An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia, 1983) 110-3.

¹⁹ An argument could be made that the baptism in the river of fire in the Coptic *Encomium on Saint John the Baptist by Saint John Chrysostom*, which claims at this point to be quoting an *Apocalypse of James* (*EncApocJa*), derives in part from the washing of the soul in the Acherusian Lake of *ApPI*. *EncApocJa* can claim to know *ApPI* on at least two other accounts: the golden boat and the fruitful date-palms of Paradise that yield ten-thousand clusters. If, in fact, *EncApocJa* does know *ApPI*, it is all the more intriguing that the author does not expressly conflate baptism in the river of fire with washing in the Acherusian Lake; he does not mention the latter at all. An edition and translation of *EncApocJa* is found in Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha*, 128-45, 335-51.

²⁰ See A. Rush, *Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity* (Washington, 1941) 112-7.

²¹ Trans. *The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1989).

found in any of the canonical gospels in that Joseph of Arimathea 'washed' (*louein*) Jesus before he wrapped his body in a linen cloth²². Tertullian and Dionysius of Alexandria also refer to post-mortem baths for the dead²³. The *Acts of Peter* (*APt*, late 2nd c. AD) has Marcellus take Peter down from the cross and bathe him in milk and wine. The washing of the dead in milk may be reflected in *ApPl* 22, which describes the Acherusian Lake as 'a river whose waters were very white, whiter than milk'²⁴.

The washing of the corpse certainly did take on deeper religious meaning for many of those who performed the act. Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, warns people not to defer baptism until the corpse is washed (*louein*) for burial²⁵ { preaching against those who linked the washing of the corpse to the washing of the soul. In the *Sacramentary of Gellone* (6th c. AD), monastic practitioners in late antique Gaul ask God to wash the soul with indulgence as they wash the body with water²⁶. Although neither of these is directly related to the traditions around the Acherusian Lake, they demonstrate that the washing of the corpse and the washing of the soul were linked in the Christian imagination.

Among the texts that deal explicitly with the Acherusian Lake, the connection to burial practices is best seen in *ApMos*. In *ApMos*, the archangel Michael expressly asks God about funeral rites. Although Abel dies before Adam, he has not yet been prepared for burial, so this is uncharted territory for everybody, angels included. God tells Michael and the others, 'Go away to Paradise in the third heaven, and strew linen clothes and cover the body of Adam and bring oil of the "oil of fragrance" and pour it over him'²⁷. Because the washing of Adam in the Acherusian Lake takes place before this

²² *GPt* 6.24, *NTA* I, 224, compare *Mt* 27.59, *Mk* 15.46, *Lk* 23.53, *Jn* 19.40.

²³ Tertullian, *Apol.* 42.2; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.22.9.

²⁴ *ApPl* 22, trans. H. Duensing and A. de Santos Otero, *NTA* II, 726.

²⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 40.11 (*PG* 36.372-373).

²⁶ *Sacramentary of Gellone* 2895, ed. A. Dumas, *CCSL* 159 (Tumhout, 1981) 462. See P. Brown, 'The Decline of the Empire of God', in C.W. Bynum and P. Freedman (eds), *Last Things. Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2000) 41-59 at 48.

²⁷ *ApMos* 40.1-2, trans. Wells, 151.

exchange between God and his archangel, De Jonge and Tromp argue that it is not related to burial practices²⁸. Granted, it is Adam's soul that is washed in the Acherusian Lake and not specifically his corpse. But it seems unnecessary to separate the care of the soul from the care of the body, as evidenced by Gregory of Nazianzus' opponents. Adam is already dead and washing of the body would naturally take place before any other rite. In fact, to have described the washing of the soul in the Acherusian Lake and then the washing of the body would have been redundant.

Although comparison to burial practices provides one answer to the question of what these texts mean by washing in the Acherusian Lake, it does not exhaust the relevant associations. 'Baptism' in *ApPt* is, in a sense, a Christianisation of a pre-Christian washing in the Acherusian Lake. This pre-Christian Acherusian Lake is not Jewish, as Peterson hoped to prove, but classical. Of the many classical sources that mention the Acherusian Lake, either as an earthly body of water or as an underworld lake, Plato's mythic description of the world in the *Phaedo* 111e-114c provides the closest parallel to the Christian apocrypha²⁹.

In Plato's *Phaedo*, souls are judged and divided into four different categories. Those who are incurable are sent to their appropriate fate in *Tartarus* from which they will never reemerge (113e). Those who have lived a life of surpassing holiness pass upward to pure regions on the earth's surface (114b-c)³⁰. Two categories of souls fall in between these two extremes: those who have lived neutrally and

²⁸ De Jonge and Tromp, *The Life of Adam and Eve*, 70.

²⁹ For descriptions of the Acherusian Lake as a real world location, see Thucydides 1.46; Livy, 8.24; Strabo 5.243-5, 6.256, 7.324; etc. For the Acherusian Lake as an underworld lake, see Homer, *Od.* 10.513; Strabo 1.26; Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.107; etc. See 'Acheron' and 'Acherusia' in *RE* 1 (Stuttgart, 1894) 217-9 and 'Acheron' in *Der Kleine Pauly* 1 (Stuttgart, 1964) 45-6; J.G. Frazer, *Pausanias's Description of Greece* 2 (London, 1913) 160-2; J.N. Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London and New York, 2002) 71-3.

³⁰ Plato also mentions a sub-category of this fourth group, namely those who purify themselves by philosophy, who will live in even more exquisite surroundings. For the separation of post-mortem souls into four separate categories, cf. 1 *Enoch* 22 and Augustine, *Enchiridion*, passim.

those whose sins are great but curable. Both of these are purified of their sins in the Achemsian Lake, which frees (*apoluein*)³¹ them through punishment (113d)³². The former, those who have lived a neutral life, are purified as a matter of course. But the latter group, which consists of souls who misused others in anger and then spent the rest of **their** lives in repentance (*metamelon*), can only enter the Acherusian Lake from their less enviable positions in the Pyriphlegethon or the Cocytus if they can convince those whom they have wronged to invite them to do so (113e-114b). For Christian authors, this final category, the curable sinners, maintains the strongest association with purification in the Achemsian Lake.

The majority of the Christian apocrypha that refer to the washing of the deceased in the Achemsian Lake agree with the *Phaedo* in that righteous souls are never washed in the lake, only the souls of sinners. This is true for the Rainer Fragment of *ApPt*, *ApMos*, *ApPl*, and *SibOr2*. *ApPt* and *SibOr2* both allow sinners to be brought into the Achemsian Lake solely through the intervention of others, while *ApMos* and *ApPl* require the soul's own repentance.

ApPt and *SibOr2* are markedly similar to the *Phaedo* because a soul cannot be washed in the Achemsian Lake without the beneficence of another soul. This reading of *ApPt* is based not on the Ethiopic version, but on M.R. James' reconstruction of the Greek Rainer fragment. James emends the passage to read, 'I will *grant* (*parexomai*) to my called and my elect whomever they *ask* of me (*hon ean aitêsontai*) from out of punishment. And I will give (*dôso*) them a beautiful baptism in salvation *of* the Acherousian lake which is said to be in the Elysian Field, a share in righteousness with my saints...' ³³. James corrects *theon ean stêsontai* to read *hon ean*

³¹ It is possible that *apolouein* in the *ApMos* is a variant of or a wordplay on the *Phaedo*'s *apoluein*.

³² Although *Plato*'s Acherusian Lake frees 'through punishment,' there is no punishment associated with the Acherusian Lake in any of the Christian apocrypha, as I mention above.

³³ James, 'Rainer Fragment', 271; see also the contributions of Adamik and Van Minnen in this volume. However, I have primarily followed the more fluid English translation of Buchholz, 345. I have made small changes, which I note through italics.

*aitêsontai*³⁴, an emendation he justifies on the basis of *SibOr2*, which he rightly reads as deeply indebted to *ApPt*³⁵. *ApPt* 14 is paraphrased beautifully in the poetic verses of *SibOr* 2.330-38³⁶:

And to them will almighty, eternal God *grant* (*parexei*) yet more.
 To the pious, when they ask eternal God (*hopotan theon aphthiton aitêsontai*),
 He will *give* (*dôsei*) them to save men out of the devouring fire
 And from everlasting torments. This *also* he will do.
 For having gathered them again from the *unwearying* flame
 And set them elsewhere, he will send them for his people's sake
 Into another life and eternal with the immortals,
 In the Elysian plain, where are the long waves
 Of the ever-flowing, deep-bosomed Acherusian Lake.

James' reconstruction of the Greek fragment of *ApPt* on the basis of *SibOr2* has been widely accepted³⁷. It is safe to say, then, that in the earliest versions of *ApPt*, as in *SibOr2*, souls are washed in the Acherusian Lake only on account of others. These souls are much like those in the *Phaedo* who are allowed to leave the *Pyriphlegethon* and the *Cocytus* because they have been forgiven by those whom they injured.

ApPt and *SibOr2* do differ from the *Phaedo* in one very significant way: they grant the ability to rescue individuals from torment to a different class of souls. In the *Phaedo*, on the one hand, it is the right of an injured soul to forgive its injurer. The injured soul is itself a neutral or curable soul who is in the Acherusian Lake, not one of those who have led a holy life and passed upward. *ApPt* and *SibOr2*, on the other hand, grant the ability to rescue other souls to 'my called

³⁴ James' reconstruction is to be preferred to reading the manuscript as it stands: 'I will give to my called and my elect God, if they will raise me from the punishment'. Or, as C.D.G. Müller, *NTA* II, 637, note 42, translates it: 'I will grant to them God, if they call to me in the torment.'

³⁵ M.R. James, *The Testament of Abraham* (Cambridge, 1892) 23-4, conjectured that *SibOr2* was based on *ApPt* even before the fuller Ethiopic manuscripts were discovered.

³⁶ *Sib. Or.* 2 330-8, trans. Ursula Treu, *NTA* II.663. Where I have modified the translation, I have used italics.

³⁷ See, for example, Peterson, 'Die "Taufe"', 310; Müller, *NTA* II, 637, note 42; Buchholz, *Your Eym*, 344; Bauckham, *The Fate*, 145.

and my elect' and the 'pious' respectively. These righteous souls do not wait in or tarry near the Acherusian Lake. Their reward is elsewhere; according to the *ApPt*, the elect 'will go rejoicing with the patriarchs into my eternal kingdom'³⁸. The Acherusian Lake is merely a 'share in righteousness', fit only for those whom the elect remove from the punishments – not the proper abode for the elect themselves. Thus, although *ApPt* and *SibOr2* agree with the *Phaedo* that the souls of the righteous do not bathe in the Acherusian Lake, they grant the ability to intercede to the righteous, not to the other neutral or curable souls.

Bauckham suggests that it is 'tempting to think that the idea of the salvation of the damned by the intercession of the righteous appealed to the author of the Apocalypse of Peter because of its congruence with the Christian tradition of praying for enemies and persecutors (*Mt* 5.44)'³⁹. Bauckham's conjecture is related to the emphasis placed in *ApPt* 2 on martyrs and martyrdom and the inclination of martyrs to pray for the forgiveness of their persecutors (*Acts* 7.60; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.2.5; Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 21.18)⁴⁰. In suggesting that the elect rescue only their persecutors, Bauckham seems to be over-influenced by the parallel text in the *Phaedo*. Neither *ApPt* nor *SibOr2* limits whom the elect are able to save from fiery torment. Bauckham is, however, very likely correct that the elect of *ApPr* derive their ability to secure the release of others through their status as martyrs. If the elect of the *ApPt* are martyrs, they can release, as *ApPt* suggests, whomever they choose⁴¹.

³⁸ *ApPt* 14, trans. Buchholz, 345.

³⁹ Bauckham, *The Fate*, 235.

⁴⁰ Bauckham, *The Fate*, 147, 153-9.

⁴¹ Peterson, 'Die "Taufe"', 315-6, suggests that the function of the Acherusian Lake in *ApPr* and *SibOr2* is a Christianised version of the Rabbinic notion that all Israel has a share in the world to come. He bases much of his argument on God saving men out of the torments for 'his people's sake' (*SibOr* 2.335). The texts, however, do not suggest that all Christians will be baptised in the Acherusian Lake, only those whom the pious choose. In fact, *SibOr* 2.339-41 does not express confidence that all Christians will be saved. for the narrative voice bemoans his own future: 'Ah, unhappy me, what will become of me in that day! For that in my folly, labouring more than all, I sinned, taking thought neither for marriage nor for reason'. trans. Treu, 663.

Already in the second century, martyrs and confessors could grant the remission of sins to their fellow Christians⁴². For instance, the account of the martyrs of Lyons and Vienne states: "They defended all and accused none; they loosed all and bound none; they prayed for those who treated them so cruelly, as did Stephen, the fulfilled martyr: "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." If he pleaded for those who were stoning him, how much more for brother-Christians?'⁴³ The intercession of a confessor on behalf of another Christian also appears in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (*APTh*) 28-9⁴⁴. Falconilla seeks Thecla's intercession from beyond the grave, and Thecla prays on her behalf so that she may go to the place of the just. The prayer is efficacious since Thecla is now facing a martyr's death. For early Christians, martyrdom was seen as a second baptism, since the first could not be repeated⁴⁵. The blood of the martyrs could wash clean not only the sins of the martyrs themselves, but of others as well⁴⁶. The use of the term 'baptism' in *ApPt* may, in fact, have derived through an association of both re-baptism through blood and the Acherusian Lake with martyr cult and not through a connection with baptismal cult⁴⁷.

The ability of the martyr-elect in *ApPr* to forgive sins makes it unnecessary for the sinning souls to repent during their own lives, as they must in the *Phaedo*. In *ApPr*, these souls repent only after dying,

⁴² See R.L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London, 1986) 338, 448-9, 458-9.

⁴³ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.2.5, trans. G.A. Williamson, *Eusebius: The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* (London, 1965) 204.

⁴⁴ The *APTh* can be securely dated between AD 160 and 200, see J. N. Bremmer, 'The Novel and the Apocryphal Acts: Place, Time, and Readership', in H. Hofmann and M. Zimmerman (eds), *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel* 9 (Groningen, 1998) 157-80 at 161 and 'The Apocryphal Acts: Authors, Place, Time and Readership', in *idem* (ed), *The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas* (Leuven, 2001) 149-70 at 153.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Tertullian, *Scorp.* 6.10-11. See also C. Straw, 'Eschatology in the Church of the Martyrs', in C.W. Bynum and P. Freedman (eds), *Last Things. Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2000) 32.

⁴⁶ See Origen, *Mart* 30.

⁴⁷ This connection would be more certain if the Acherusian Lake were ever described as a lake of blood, which it is not.

'when there is no time for repentance and life did not remain'⁴⁸. However, in certain other texts, namely *ApMos* and *ApPl*, repentance is essential in order for a soul to be washed in the Acherusian Lake. Thus, it is likely that for these texts, the ability of martyrs to forgive sins is not operative. What seems to be at work is an otherworldly rite that marks the completed penance of an individual.

In *ApMos*, Adam repents when he is being driven from Paradise⁴⁹. His great fault is, of course, that he listened to Eve and ate of the tree that was forbidden him⁵⁰. As in the *Phaedo*, repentance is only the first step, and it must be followed by the intercession of another being. In Adam's case, intercession does not come through anyone he wronged or the pious dead, but the holy angels themselves⁵¹. *ApMos* marks the acceptance of Adam's repentance and the success of the angels' prayers through his washing in the Acherusian Lake.

ApPl, on the other hand, makes no mention of intercession at all. The crucial act is the repentance of the soul prior to death. Repentance of souls after they are already experiencing the punishments, even when coupled with the intercession of Paul and the archangel Michael, does not lead to the baptism of these souls in the Acherusian Lake. These souls gain only a brief annual ease from their torments⁵². The souls that are washed in the Acherusian Lake are those souls who repent while they are still alive⁵³:

This is the Acherusian Lake; the city of the Saints, which the father built for his only begotten son Jesus Christ, is east of all these things. It is not allowed for everyone to go into it. It is on account of this that the Acherusian Lake is on the way. If (one is) a fornicator or a sinner and

⁴⁸ *ApPt* 13, trans. Buchholz, *Your Eyes*, 227.

⁴⁹ *ApMos* 27. Eve repents in *ApMos* 32; she takes most of the blame upon herself for causing Adam to eat.

⁵⁰ *ApMos* 7, 21-25; cf. *Gen* 3.

⁵¹ *ApMos* 35, trans. Wells, 149.

⁵² *ApPl* 43-44. The long Latin grants this ease only on Easter day, while the Coptic grants not only Easter, but also the 50 days following Easter and every Sunday.

⁵³ *ApPl* 22, trans. Copeland, 200-1. I have followed the Coptic here because Michael 'washes' the soul. In the Latin, Michael 'baptises' the soul. Otherwise, the two versions are quite similar.

he turns and repents (metanoëin) and produces fruit worthy of repentance (*metanoia*) and (then) he leaves the body, he first worships God and (then) he is given into the hands of Michael. He (Michael) washes him in the Acherusian Lake, and he is taken into the city to those who have not sinned.

Repentance is a recurring motif throughout *ApPl*. Elsewhere in *ApPl*, when the soul is brought before God in heaven, God does not allow the angel to relate the soul's bad deeds from its youth, only from the last year of its life. If the soul repents in that final year, God forgives it⁵⁴. The repentant soul is washed in the Acherusian Lake and brought into the city of Christ. The overarching emphasis placed on repentance in *ApPl* suggests that this text describes a final ritual ablu-tion of the repentant soul, a mark that, unlike the first baptism, cannot be undone through sin since the soul is now dead.

Although the role of the intercessor is not as powerful in *ApPl* as in our other texts, *ApPl* agrees with them that only the souls of sinners are washed in the Acherusian Lake. There is no mention of those 'who have not sinned' being washed into the Acherusian Lake. They are merely led into the city of Christ⁵⁵, sailing, no doubt, over the Acherusian Lake as Paul does in his otherworldly tour: 'And the angel answered and said to me: Follow me and I shall lead you into the city of Christ. And he stood by Lake Acherusia and put me in a golden boat and about three thousand angels were singing a hymn before me until I reached the city of Christ'⁵⁶.

Paul's journey over the Acherusian Lake recalls another fourth century text, Paul of Tamma's treatise on the *Cell*. Paul of Tamma tells his spiritual son⁵⁷: 'My son, obey God and keep his commandments and be wise and remain in your dwelling place, which is dear to you, as your cell remains with you in your heart while you are seeking after its grace. And the labor of your cell will come with you to God. Your cell will take you over the Acherusian Lake, and it will take you into the church of the firstborn' (cf. Heh 12.23). Here, as in

⁵⁴ *ApPl* 17. Greek, Coptic, Latin (StG, Am; P: five years; Esc not extant).

⁵⁵ *ApPl* 22.

⁵⁶ *ApPl* 23, trans. Duensing, 727.

⁵⁷ Paul of Tamma, *Cell* 1-2, ed. T. Orlandi, Paolo di *Tamma Opere* (Rome, 1988) 88 (trans. mine).

the other Christian texts, there is no mention of the Achemsian Lake being a lake of fire or a place of punishment, yet Paul of Tamma teaches his spiritual son that it is necessary to pass over it. Reading the *Cell* in the light of the aforementioned Christian apocrypha raises the strong possibility that, for Paul of Tamma, the goal is to be righteous enough not to require washing in the Achemsian Lake⁵⁸. In all of these texts, the washing has been reserved only for sinners. Devotion to one's cell should render one's soul pure enough to pass over the Achemsian Lake, as Paul is able to in *ApPl*. In texts such as *ApPl* and the *Cell*, washing in the Acherusian Lake is only a last resort, not because there is any implication of punishment, but because the washing would demonstrate that one had not led a righteous life.

ApPt, *SibOr2*, *ApMos*, *ApPl*, and the *Cell* all present Christianised views of Plato's *Phaedo*. *ApPt* and *SibOr2* rewrite the intercession of others in the *Phaedo* in light of the ability of Christian martyrs to forgive sins. *ApMos* and *ApPl* connect the repentance of the sinners in Plato's Achemsian Lake with Christian penance, a theme that is negatively represented in the *Cell*. The question must be asked, did any of these draw independently from the *Phaedo*, or do the later texts merely repeat themes from the earlier texts?

Although the exact relationship among these texts is uncertain, a few observations can be made. First, this portion of the *Phaedo*, known independently as the *Dialogue of the Soul*, was well known to early Christians and met with considerable approval. Eusebius, for example, quotes the entirety of *Phaedo* 113a5-114c9 to prove that Plato held beliefs about the afterlife of the soul parallel to his reading of the Hebrew Scriptures⁵⁹. Thus, the image of the Acherusian Lake

⁵⁸ Orlandi, *Paolo*, 15, writes, 'In primo luogo l'accento all'attraversamento della palude Acherusia (De *Cella*, 2), che rinvia probabilmente alla cultura "magica" dell'epoca, piuttosto che a fonti classiche'. Although Orlandi is certainly right that Paul of Tamma does not draw his reference to the Acherusian Lake directly from classical sources, it seems that Christian apocalyptic has a better case for being Paul of Tamma's source than 'la cultura "magica"'.
⁵⁹ Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 11.38. See also Clement, *Strom.* 14; Arnobius, 2.14, and Eusebius, *Or. Const.* 9.

could have entered the Christian apocrypha directly from the *Phaedo* and continued to be informed by the *Phaedo*, even as it started to develop primarily within the Christian tradition. Second, the only one of the Christian texts to maintain an interest both in individual repentance and the intercession of others is *ApMos*. This may suggest, as Peterson claims it does, that *ApMos* is the source for *ApPt* and *ApPl*⁶⁰. This would support the argument made by Himmelfarb that *ApPt* should not be seen so readily as the literary source of *ApPl*⁶¹. Third, even if these texts choose to emphasise only one aspect of how the sinner arrives in the Acherusian Lake, i.e. either through repentance or intercession, all of them maintain that only sinners are washed in the Acherusian Lake. *ResJC* breaks with this tradition and describes the washing of a righteous man in the lake.

In *ResJC*, the disciple Thomas' son Siophanes dies. When he is raised from the dead by his father, he tells of his ascension into heaven, including his washing in the Achemsian Lake by Michael. Siophanes is not a sinner; on the contrary, he is called 'beloved' and 'blessed' by his father Thomas. Furthermore, when Siophanes comes to the river of fire prior to being washed in the Achemsian Lake, the former becomes like a river of water to him, implying that he is a worthy soul⁶². The Acherusian Lake is now for the righteous and not merely – or perhaps, not even – for the sinners.

2. Acherusian Lake, the Righteous, and Baptismal Cult

Also in *ResJC*, the Christian tradition of the Acherusian Lake has, for the first time, a true association with baptismal cult. Siophanes' ac-

⁶⁰ Peterson, 'Die "Taufe"', 320.

⁶¹ Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 140-7, 169-71.

⁶² Of a parallel nature, although not directly related, is the myth of underworld lakes and streams that prove whether or not an individual is innocent and chaste. Notably, the chastity test in the River Styx in Achilles Tatius' *Cleitophon and Leucippe* and Bardaisan's lake that rises if the accused is guilty and remains at knee-height if innocent. Cf. J.N. Bremner, 'Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus in Christian East Syria', in H.L.J. Vanstiphout *et al.* (eds), *All Those Nations... Cultural Encounters Within and With the Near East* (Groningen, 1999) 21-29 at 21-23.

count of his post-mortem adventure leads to the baptism of a large number of people⁶³:

And when the crowd heard these things, they cast themselves upon their faces and worshipped him, saying, 'We beseech you, show us the place where the servant of Christ is [...]'. [...] And he took them to the place where the Apostle was. [...] And when the whole multitude had cried out these things, the Apostle blessed them, and he baptised (*baptizein*) twelve thousand men among them on that day. And he marked out for them the foundations of a church, and he appointed Siophanes the bishop of the church.

ResJC implies that those who want to experience Siophanes' fate – including his heavenly baptism – must first be baptised on earth. The fact that both of these departures from the earlier tradition, the washing of a righteous soul in the Acherusian Lake and the explicit association with baptismal cult, occur in the same text strengthens the argument that the earlier texts are not concerned primarily with baptismal cult. It also implies that a connection between baptismal cult and the Acherusian Lake requires that righteous are washed in the lake.

There is one final text in which the link between the Achemsian Lake and sinners is erased from the tradition, namely in the Ethiopic version of *ApPt*. In this version of *ApPt*, the righteous are baptised in the Achemsian Lake, not those whom they choose out of torment^M:

And then I will give my elect, my righteous, the baptism and salvation which they requested of me. In the field of *Akerosya* which is called *Aneslasleya* a portion of the righteous have flowered, and I will go there now. I will rejoice with them. I will lead the peoples into my eternal kingdom and I will make for them what I have promised them, that which is eternal, I and my heavenly Father.

In the Ethiopic *ApPt*, only the elect deserve baptism in the Acherusian Lake. By this stage in its history, *ApPt* rejected the idea that sinners could find a post-mortem release through the intercession of the martyr elect. In this version, 'baptism' in the Acherusian Lake

⁶³ *ResJC*, fol. 20a-20b, ed. Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha*, 39-40 (trans. mine); Westerhoff's section 71, pp. 184-5.

⁶⁴ *ApPt* 14 E, trans. Buchholz, 345.

is more deeply related to baptismal cult since now it is the righteous who are baptised. This transformation was already beginning to take place in the Rainer fragment, which testifies to the intercession of the martyr elect only in James' reconstruction. No doubt, this passage owes its instability to the fact that the intercession of martyrs on behalf of others was a contested practice in the early church⁶⁵. Thus, as the Ethiopic version of the *ApPt* demonstrates, ultimately baptismal cult was a far less controversial referent for the Acherusian Lake.

We have come full circle, from the Rainer fragment of the *ApPt* to the Ethiopic version of the *ApPt*. In between, there are a number of images of the Acherusian Lake in various Christian sources. Although Plato's *Socrates* ends his tale with the caveat, 'Of course, no reasonable man ought to insist that the facts are exactly as I have described them'⁶⁶, the image of the Acherusian Lake in the Christian visions remains surprisingly close to his description. Despite the debt to the *Phaedo* and the remarkable stability of the theme over several centuries, the Acherusian Lake has been Christianised in a number of ways. First, it is linked to the washing of the dead, most easily seen in *ApMos*. Second, for the early Greek *ApPt* and *SibOr2*, it has strong associations with the ability of the martyrs to forgive sins. Third, for *ApPl* and Paul of Tamma's *Cell*, it becomes an otherworldly rite marking the completion of penance. In the majority of the texts, washing in the Acherusian Lake is reserved for sinners. Only in *ResJC* and the Ethiopic version of *ApPt*, does the Acherusian Lake become a place for the baptism of the righteous, breaking completely from the *Phaedo* and assimilating to baptismal cult⁶⁷.

⁶⁵ The abuse of the confessors' ability to forgive sins was scorned by Tertullian (*De pud.* 22, *Ad ux.* 2.4.1, *Ad Mart.* 1.6, *De paen.* 9.4, *Scorp.* 10.8) and Cyprian (Ep. 27.1, 15.4, 20.1).

⁶⁶ Plato, *Phaedo* 114d, bans. H. Tredennick in E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (eds), *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (Princeton, 1961) 94.

⁶⁷ I would like to thank Peter Brown, Martha Himmelfarb, Elaine Pagels, Jan Bremmer, Ra'anan Abusch, Annette Reed. and Mychal Rosenbaum for their comments and suggestions.